DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 219 755 CS 207 021

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TITLE The Dynamics of Advising an American Advertising Federation Competition Team: An Inside Look.
PUB DATE Jul 82
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (65th, Athens, OH, July 25-28, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advertising; *Competition; *Faculty Advisers; Group Activities; Higher Education; Teacher Guidance; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS American Advertising Federation; Texas Tech University

ABSTRACT

The perennial success of Texas Tech University teams competing in the annual National American Advertising Federation Student Advertising Competition highlights three of the diverse roles an adviser to a competing team must fulfill. Although no one adviser posseses expertise in all fields, such as marketing, drama, or English, the adviser must be a generalist who can effectively manipulate the activities that take place within these fields while preparing for competition. As a promotor, the adviser must conduct in-house "pitches" to encourage first rate students to apply, and conduct outside promotions that will cultivate connections with news sources and printers or other businesses that work in advertising. Effective promotion is contingent upon the adviser's skill at organization. Though organizational structures vary depending on the case type, the number of team members, and their respective abilities, the adviser should conceptualize a schematic portraying the selected structure. He or she must also establish the boundaries of responsibilities and behavior. The final test of competition preparation is how well teams perform in the competition. The adviser should take into consideration all variables distinguishing the classroom from the real competition and conceive of a pre-competition evaluation system that is fair and allows students the educational benefits of such a learning experience. (HTH)

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ADVERTISING DIVISION

THE DYNAMICS OF ADVISING AN AMERICAN ADVERTISING FEDERATION COMPETITION TEAM: AN INSIDE LOOK

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Presented to the Advertising Division, Association for Education in Journalism, annual convention, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, July, 1982

THE DYNAMICS OF ADVISING AN AMERICAN ADVERTISING FEDERATION COMPETITION TEAM: AN INSIDE LOOK

INTRODUCTION

The American Advertising Federation in conjunction with a major United States Corporation annually sponsors the National AAF Student Advertising Competition. Over one-hundred University and College teams compete on a regional level with the winners then competing on a national level in the Competition finals. In 1981, the Texas Tech University Competition Team won the Tenth District's regional competition. The Team then competed in the national finals in Washington, D.C. and placed fifth among the fifteen teams competing. The success of the 1981 Texas Tech Team represents a four-year pattern of successful competition teams from the University. In two of the past four years, Texas Tech teams have advanced to the national finals, placing second and fifth. In the remaining two years, Texas Tech teams have placed second in the regional competition, once a very close second to the eventual national winners.

Given the successful history of these teams, the intent here is to isolate several of the roles the team's advisors have filled and to trace the dynamics of those roles as they are integral to a successful competition team's structure and performance. As such, the dynamics of the roles are approached philosophically and methodologically, and they are based on two guiding principles: a positive educational experience for the students and the development of a winning team. This does not mean to say that a thorough philosophical or methodological program is to be proposed, nor that those observations and recommendations to be made are correct for any situation or team, nor that those observations and recommendations are not suitable for other types of team-oriented competitions. Rather, what is

to be porposed is but one perspective of the means by which an advisor can view the advising responsibility. And such a responsibility is necessarily panoramic since the advisor's first and foremost responsibility toward the team is to be an effective generalist.

ADVISOR AS GENERALIST

Obviously, no one individual can possess expertise in such diverse fields as psychology, marketing, advertising, drama, public relations, art, or english. And though these fields do overlap within the AAF Competition Team experience, they are not without their divided, self-enclosed properties. The problem then confronting the advisor is how to effectively maniuplate the activities which take place within these sometimes divergent fields. To be an advisor it is not enough to have the expertise in one's special field of interest, or even to be able to successfully communicate the field's workings, subtle or otherwise, to students. A team's competition proposal and presentation are not a reflection of what the advisor knows in a specific sense. Rather, they are an amalgamation of how the advisor has directed what the students have learned, and that learning invariably takes one beyond any single academic field. Thus, in a sense, the advisor becomes a generalist who is expected and needed to work within the shifting, divergent levels of self-interest and expertise.

Within the Competition experience, it is the team members whose responsibility is to delve deeply into specific fields of interest as they pertain to the particular case study problem. In standing apart, the advisor becomes the governor of the many fields. In effect, the students become the specialists. The advisor becomes the generalist. And as generalist, the advisor must be prepared to wear many hats indeed.

ADVISOR AS PROMOTER

Though not directly related to a particular AAF case study problem, the advisor as promoter is related to the specialists,

facilities, and tools which are requisite for success in tackling virtually any and all cases. This relationship involves the advisor's success in promoting the AAF Competition as the ultimate experience in advertising education. Importantly however, it is a promotion which takes place inside and outside an Advertising Division or Department. If it is successful inside, a tradition of excellence in accomplishment and self-fulfillment will ensue. If it is successful outside, a ready pipeline to those with special abilities and/or funds will ensue. The optimum, of course, is to be successful in both, for they are the beginning of an advisor's gerenalized responsibilities.

Inside Promotion

The main objective in promoting the AAF Competition as the ultimate educational experience is to gain the advantages of having first-rate students apply, stimulating their enthusiasm, and receiving the assistance of division or departmental facilities and/or personnel. Steps toward achievement of that objective must begin with the advisor's conceptualization of an 'in-house' promotional plan. Communication avenues to students, administration, and faculty must be conceived and used. For example, class memos, wall posters created by layout students, faculty 'pitches' to students, stated limits on enrollment numbers and application time, video tape presentations (available from AAF) of past winners, and guarantees of a finished, polished proposal book for each member to use as portfolio material are but a few of the means by which a promotional blitz can be effected. In addition, past students of the Competition, either in person or by mail, can provide testimony to the value of the Competition as an educational experience or as a tool in securing and/or performing a job upon graduation. Further, professionals within the local community can also provide testimony to the Competition's worth.

Once underway and applications which define and differentiate student expertise (grades, references, samples of work, etc.) and

interest (task preferences, hobbies, personality traits, etc.) are received, the selection of team members should be geared toward balancing the many areas of expertise needed to put together a comprehensive proposal. This means flexibility in the selection process. For example, a student with a low grade point average may be just what the team will need if he/she demonstrates a flair for comprehensive art or picture perfect photography skills. The point is that selection should be based on juggling the talents of those applying so as to conceive of a team whose members are capable and willing to cover the areas. This may also mean promoting applications from students in other areas or from other majors to fill in foreseeable gaps.

Once the team is selected, further promotion centered on the honor of selection can be initiated. In addition, within the team itself, cermonial brotherhood or sisterhood activities serve to enhance prestige and closeness. In this sense, a type of closed society is established, one which designs and implements its own codes of behavior and is responsible for its own fate. For example, private systems of reward and punishment such as paper daggers or paper hearts placed in team members' 'in-house' mail slots or boxes can serve the dual functions of promoting open communication and pride between members as well as promoting the team as an autonomous club within a larger unit of advertising students. Further, to enhance prestige, low-cost sales of the team book can be made through classes and/or campus bookstores.

Outside Promotion

Naturally, outside promotion does not exclude the effects it may have within a team, a division, or a department. In many ways, inside and outside promotion overlap. But through outside promotion, an advisor can create a pipeline to vital areas of specialization. For example, a perpetual flow of news releases directed by the advisor but created by a designated committee within the team can gain the advantage of trade-offs with local printers, photo houses, or typesetters. In this regard,

appropriate dedications within the team book are solid sales points. Similarly, the team book and presentation can be made available to classes inside and outside the division or department, and to local ad clubs. Indeed, the final presentation, complete with audio and video embellishments, can be presented to more than just advertising students. For example, the 1981 Texas Tech Competition Team promoted its presentation to all Advertising, Mass Communications, Business, Art, Psychology, Theatre Arts, English, and Speech Communications students and to local advertising professionals. The presentation drew over two-hundred people from inside and outside the department. In addition, media coverage took place. Typically, AAF teams also organize car washes, sell advertising, or participate in various programs and promotions to gather funds. Such activities are newsworthy, and it is not unusual to gain media exposure for the team as a result.

An initial task then of the advisor is to promote the Competition and the Team as types of supra-educational entities. In so doing, the Team gains an autonomous and prestigious standing inside and outside its own enviornment. A word of caution, however, is that the advisor should be prepared to cope with the disadvantage of temporarily inflated egos. Such active promotion can lead to a brand of elitism, but if deftly handled, the benefits of cooperation, finance, resourcefulness, and overall performance will likely outweigh that elitism.

ADVISOR AS ORGANIZER

Obviously, effective promotion is contingent upon sound organization, and those to be organized are the team members. And in this respect, a philosophical and methodological guideline of 'leader and led' provides an optimum educational experience.

Within recent past Texas Tech teams, there has been a tradition of every team member acting the roles of a leader and a follower in an advertising agency format. At some point in the AAF experience, each student assumes a Directorship

role and a committee membership role (at least one, though this can move upwards to three or four). Consequently, upon completion of the team's efforts, each member has gained two educational benefits. First, each has experienced first-hand the agonies and ecstasies of leadership and membership. Each is able to trace the differences between the two and to draw conclusions based upon a bit more solid ground than when the team first started. Second, each is able to include a Director-ship title in the team book and ultimately on a resume.

Potentially bothersome with such a system is the prospect of too many committees carrying on in helter-skelter fashion with the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing. This is a possibility. However, the AAF Competition is typically a 'soup-to-nuts' affair, including a full range of committee possibilities within an advertising problem format. The team receives a case study from AAF and the sponsoring company. This case study outlines pertinent information to the advertising problem. The team then begins at scratch, works its way through research, objectives and strategies, problems and opportunities, creative, media, and sales promotion. A book is produced and a presentation created. Within these aspects there is the potential for a multitude of committees. For example, a committee exclusively devoted to the case study and rules governing the competition is a necessity. Often, the parameters of students' activity or types of work to be done or allowed are ambiguous or never approached. Such a committee's responsibility is to find these areas, request information or guidelines from AAF, and make recommendations to the team. In 1981, the Texas Tech Team communicated with AAF headquarters on nine separate occasions regarding rule clarifications and/or specific information. The task was in the hands of the Case Study and Rules Committee whose findings were instrumental in determining specific team book and presentation strategies. Similarly, in regard to the actual team presentation, a range of committees including photography, script, production, and direction represent areas of responsibility which allow students to partake in work

they enjoy and wish to pursue upon graduation.

Though organizational structures vary depending upon the case type, the amount of team members, and their respective abilities, a schematic portraying the selected structure should be conceptualized by the advisor. Schematically represented, the structure will align team members with their responsibilities, designate the proper channels of communication, and portray the hierarchy of Directorship and membership. For example, given 15 team members (an optimum number of team members ranges from 12 to 16), 15 committees are necessary to allow for 15 Directorships. A schematic for this hypothetical situation may resemble that proposed in Exhibit A following this paper. From the beginning, each member participates with varying degrees of intensity and responsibility in the developmental phases of the advertising problem's eventual solution. As the flow of time and work passes, the responsibilities shift to allow each team member to experience the two roles of 'leader and led,' thus gaining two sides of educational benefit.

In addition to creating the organizational structure, the advisor, wary of potential waste in time and effort, establishes the boundaries of responsibilities and behavior. For example, since a multitude of committees could yield a multitude of meetings which, in turn, could yield stasis or confusion, boundaries on the structure of meetings need to be established. Pre-agendas, requirements for minutes, time deadlines on meeting lengths and work accomplishments, and progress reports serve to create a tightness and efficiency in a potentially cumbersome structure.

Again, as in promotion, the advisor's role is one of directing and conceiving. Central to all competition teams, this role moves the advisor beyond the immediate range of his/her field of study. The advisor, within the realms of promotion and organization, encounters sub-roles as well, roles such as referee, parent, counselor, recreation director, motivator, and liason or intermediary, to name a few. The result is that the advisor must step into and out of many responsibilities. not one of wnich is exactly like those encountered in a typical classroom

situation. And equally removed from typical classroom standards is the role the advisor must play as evaluator.

ADVISOR AS EVALUATOR

It is one thing to grade a test. It is quite another to grade a competition entry. But ultimately, the final test for a competition team is how well it performs in the competition. At the same time, this becomes an uncontrollable variable. Similarly, the advisor's perspective, unlike the perspective in the classroom, may lack verification. Consequently, the advisor should take into consideration all variables and conceive of an evaluation system which is just and which allows team members to gain an educational benefit. In this regard, a system based on balance merits consideration.

Past Texas Tech team members have been evaluated in the following manner: Directors evaluations of members, 30%; Members' evaluations of Directors, 20%; Account Executive evaluation of team members, 10%; Advisor's evaluation of team members, 20%; and team placement in the regional competition (if first, A; if second, B; if third, C, and so on), 20%. Directors and members evaluate each other twice during the team's existence, once mid-way into the semester and once following the regional competition. Since the Account Executive is integral to all phases of the team's work and success, he/she evaluates all members which, in turn, places pressure on those members to meet the demands of the Account Executive. It is a balanced system which eliminates the possibilities of an evaluative warp and which provides students with the educational benefit of various perspectives of their work effort.

Of course, such a formula for evaluation is based on the fact that the team is to be treated as a class, and that a grade is required. It is possible that this need not be the case. But even so, some form of evaluation seems only just if students are to derive the benefit of 'knowing where they stand.' And to this end, the advisor again must conceive of a plan.

CONCLUSION

To isolate but three roles of responsibility for an advisor of an AAF Competition Team necessarily excludes other important roles. But the roles of promoter, organizer, and evaluator bring into focus the beginning, middle, and end of the advisor's overall responsibility. There is no team without promotion. There is no success without organization. And there is no justice for the students' work efforts without evaluation. The advisor's task is to conceive strategies and executions which work within these three areas so as to maximize the team's potential for successful accomplishment. This often takes the advisor away form special fields of vision and into more panoramic viewpoints. He/she becomes a generalist within the flow of the team's specific efforts. At times upbraiding and at other times praising, the advisor conceives and manipulates the umbrella structure, forcing it into action and making certain it stays on track. Such a task ultimately requires an effective generalist's point of view.